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LETTER DATED 27 FEBRUARY 1997 FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to convey the attached communication, dated 25 February 1997, which I have received from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I would appreciate your bringing it to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

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Annex

Letter dated 25 February 1997 from the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization addressed to the Secretary-General

In accordance with Security Council resolution 1088 (1996), I attach the second monthly report on Stabilization Force (SFOR) operations. I would appreciate your making this report available to the Security Council.

The past month has been an eventful one in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as this report makes clear. However, in the wake of the Brcko arbitration decision and the violent events in Mostar and the zone of separation, the military situation in the region remains calm. Nevertheless, the recent violence gives cause for concern, and the international community must remain prepared to face further challenges in the months ahead. SFOR is prepared for such challenges, and will continue to play its part in contributing to a lasting peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

(Signed) Javier SOLANA

Appendix

Monthly report to the United Nations Security Council on SFOR operations

SFOR operations

1. There are approximately 32,000 SFOR troops currently deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with contributions from all the NATO nations and from 18 non-NATO countries. The first phase of Operation Joint Guard, which began on 20 December 1996 under the authority of Security Council resolution 1088 (1996), terminated on 3 February 1997, with all SFOR headquarters and manoeuvre forces deployed and fully mission-capable. The second phase of Operation Joint Guard, the stabilization phase, has now begun, and over the coming months SFOR will continue its efforts to keep the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina by accomplishing its principal military tasks and by providing selective support to the international civil organizations in theatre, thereby contributing to a progressive implementation of broad civilian programmes. At the same time, SFOR will remain vigilant to threats to the Force and challenges to the provisions of the Peace Agreement.

2. Over the past month, SFOR has continued to carry out area reconnaissance and surveillance through ground and air patrols across the region. Random inspections of cantonment sites have been conducted, and SFOR and the International Police Task Force (IPTF) have worked together to clear illegal checkpoints from the zone of separation.

Cooperation and compliance by the parties

3. Although the parties are still assessed as being in general compliance with the military provisions of the Peace Agreement, the past month has seen an increase in tension; houses have been destroyed by arson or explosion, displaced persons attempting to return to their homes have been forced back and violence has flared up, most notably in the city of Mostar and in villages in and around the zone of separation.

4. Since the beginning of its mandate (20 December 1996), SFOR has conducted more than 750 compliance inspections. Unauthorized weapons continue to be confiscated and destroyed, and discrepancies have been found in the number of declared and stored weapons. Occasionally, the parties have moved weapons without authorization, and SFOR has then responded with weapon and ammunition confiscation and subsequent destruction. In mid-January, at a Joint Military Commission meeting, SFOR temporarily suspended its confiscation policy in order to give the parties an opportunity to declare additional weapons and ammunition and to move newly declared weapons and ammunition to cantonment sites. This is a two-phased suspension - the first phase (17 January to 15 February) allowed the Parties to declare previously undeclared weapons and to move them to authorized cantonment sites; the second (15 February to 17 March) will allow only the transportation of weapons declared during the first phase.

5. Freedom of movement and, more specifically, freedom of return continue to give rise to concern, and over the reporting period there have been serious incidents in and around the villages of Celic, Gajevi and Stolac, as well as in the city of Mostar. Between 30 January and 20 February, 15 illegal checkpoints - 2 Bosniac, 5 Bosnian Croat and 8 Bosnian Serb - were dismantled by SFOR and IPTF.

6. On 23 January, following tensions between Bosnian Serbs and Bosniacs attempting to return to their pre-war homes, SFOR declared a temporary restricted zone on the Bosnian Serb side of the zone of separation near Celic, in which civilian police were required to be escorted by IPTF. On 26 January, in the nearby village of Gajevi, an organized and orchestrated incident took place when a large group of Bosnian Serbs attacked Bosniac workers who were constructing houses as part of an approved return process under the aegis of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In the absence of Bosnian Serb police, SFOR troops moved in, separated the two groups and restored order. In a subsequent joint démarche to the Bosnian Serb President, Dr. Plavsic, the Commander of SFOR, the High Representative and the IPTF Commissioner called for the immediate suspension of the local Chief of Police, the apprehension of the individuals involved in the attack and the immediate participation by the Bosnian Serb police in joint patrols. The joint SFOR/IPTF/Bosnian Serb patrols began in early February and are continuing. Meanwhile, Bosniac resettlement attempts were suspended. They began again on 12 February, when approximately 20 Bosniacs resumed construction of prefabricated homes in the village.

7. In a further incident, on 31 January, nine Bosniac families tried to return to Stolac from Mostar. SFOR troops had been deployed, at the request of UNHCR, to provide general area security. However, the Bosniac convoy was stopped by approximately 400 Bosnian Croats, mainly women and children, who began throwing rocks and eggs. UNHCR then cancelled the operation, and the settlers returned to Mostar. The Bosniacs have not yet attempted to return to Stolac.

8. Mostar itself has been the scene of a recent violent confrontation between Bosniacs and Bosnian Croats. During the first week of February, the situation in the city began to deteriorate, with reports of numerous explosions and evictions of Bosniacs by Bosnian Croats. In response, SFOR and IPTF patrols were increased. On 10 February, violence flared between a group of Bosniacs visiting a cemetery in West Mostar and a Bosnian Croat carnival parade in the vicinity. Shots were fired and the Bosniacs withdrew. One Bosniac died, and between 20 and 40 people, mainly Bosniacs, were injured. At the request of IPTF, SFOR assistance was provided and SFOR troops succeeded in isolating the incident and preventing it from spreading. The SFOR presence in Mostar was subsequently increased, with additional checkpoints and patrolling, in order to prevent any similar clashes between the two local communities. As a result of this increased presence, a number of small arms were confiscated and several illegal Croat checkpoints dismantled. On 12 February, SFOR participated in a meeting of Federation representatives and international officials, when agreement was reached on decreasing inter-ethnic tension in Mostar. IPTF has now been tasked with conducting an independent investigation to determine who was responsible for the escalation of violence and attacks on Mostar citizens. At the moment, the situation in the city remains tense, but calm.

9. In anticipation of the Brcko arbitration decision in mid-February, tensions ran high both in the city itself and in the region generally. In late January, therefore, SFOR imposed a temporary exclusion zone around Brcko, prohibiting the parties from moving forces within 10 km of the city. SFOR patrols in the city were also increased.

10. In late January and early February, in what appeared to be a reaction to the anticipated arbitration decision, there were numerous reports of mobilization by Bosniac and Bosnian Serb units. Reservists were called up, and there was an overall significant increase in training activity. On 11 February, in order to defuse the tensions caused by these developments and to pre-empt any acts that might be misunderstood or considered provocative by either side, SFOR suspended, with immediate effect, all training outside barracks, with the exception of flight training. All troops involved in training outside barracks, whether regular or reserve, were ordered to return to barracks by midday on 13 February. This suspension period will remain in force for as long as SFOR deems necessary. SFOR also ordered the immediate stand-down of all reserves and their return to their homes by 1800 hours on 13 February. The parties complied with the training ban and with the order to stand-down their reserves.

11. In the immediate aftermath of the arbitration decision on 14 February, the situation in Brcko remained calm. SFOR will continue to play its role in contributing to a secure environment in and around Brcko, and will also provide support to IPTF as it increases its presence there.

12. None of the parties is yet judged to be compliant with respect to demining, although it is hoped that the decisions taken at the mid-January meeting of the Joint Military Commission (paragraph 7 of the previous monthly report refers (see S/1997/81)) will speed up operations significantly. Within the framework of those decisions, the parties are to produce a properly resourced demining programme by mid-February.

13. The Bosniac and Bosnian Serb Parties are still non-compliant in the mandatory return of prisoners of war (POWs). The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) records 13 POWs still held in Bosniac and Serb prisons, and it is also possible that there may be more POWs detained by the entities.

Cooperation with international organizations

14. SFOR continues to provide support within its capabilities to the international civil organizations in theatre and, as noted above, continues to work extensively with IPTF on a daily basis to maintain local security and to facilitate freedom of movement for the local population. SFOR will continue to assist the Office of the High Representative, UNHCR and IPTF in implementing jointly developed procedures for the orderly and phased return of refugees and displaced persons in the zone of separation. In addition, SFOR has assisted IPTF in developing a number of programmes, such as the definition of entity jurisdictional boundaries for IPTF.

15. SFOR and OSCE have established a close and cooperative relationship, especially with regard to preparations for the municipal elections, currently scheduled for July. SFOR has played an increased role in helping to staff the

OSCE Election Operations Centre and in providing assistance to OSCE staff in the correlation and consolidation of election plans.

16. SFOR support will continue to be given to OSCE in its role with respect to Annex I B of the Peace Agreement. Updated data on the parties' weapons holdings in SFOR-authorized sites will continue to be provided to the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.